

Prior to the revolutionary impact of Prussian Blue, regarded as the first modern synthetic pigment, blue was a luxury civilization could seldom afford. Lapis Lazuli, the stone from which blue pigment was first derived, was exceedingly rare, found almost exclusively in Afghanistan. The Egyptians for a time found a way around it, but for the most part the color was so scarce that the ancient Greeks didn't bother to name it, opting instead to describe phenomena like the sea and the sky as their own unique hues.

Emma McMillan's exhibition, *Bleu de Prusse*, centers this technological contingency and in doing so highlights the ways in which the color blue constitutes a rich material modality; a reminder that language, whether verbal or visual, is ultimately an augmentation of action and as such inevitably reflects our affordances with respect to the world.

Prussian Blue was the industrialization of blue: a renewed widespread availability proved coextensive with newfound affordances in numerous corners of science and industry, many of which are well known to the artist from her experience working as a draftsman where this hue, unreadable by copiers, was utilized specifically for its capacity for silence.

There are many more ways by which this modality runs deeper than anything it can, or at least wants to,

say to us: the pigment itself is a treatment for certain types of heavy metal and radiation poisoning; and yet simultaneously this normally non-toxic substance will turn into cyanide when heated up too much. The nebulosity by which McMillan's paintings subvert any sense of structural stability would suggest that perhaps Prussian Blue is better seen as having a catlike temperament, only agreeing on its own terms to cooperate with humans and machines alike. It can be used to help smooth out metal surfaces as it won't corrode the material, yet it remains feral, a swatch ultimately inseparable from its corporeal source: it is impossible to replicate on a computer screen, a reminder that art is still art, never truly reducible to zeros and ones, and as such, the terrain on which McMillan stages a game of resistance and surrender with futurity and a radical call for love.

Alexander Boland, January 2019.

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